

GPA: J. DEAN

(22) M-611

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

7626-5411/6-1058

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: June 10, 1958

SUBJECT: The Helicopter Incident.

PARTICIPANTS: Erich Straetling, First Secretary, German Embassy
Jonathan Dean, GPA

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In the course of a general discussion of German policy towards Eastern Europe occasioned by Foreign Minister von Brentano's remarks on that subject to the Secretary during his recent visit here, Herr Straetling himself brought up the subject of the American helicopter whose crew is now being held by the Soviet Zone regime. Herr Straetling, who stated he was speaking for himself and not expressing an official viewpoint, said that he fully understood the humanitarian and domestic political considerations which had apparently prompted the Secretary's press conference remarks about the United States negotiating "with kidnappers". Nevertheless, he said the prospect of American negotiations with officials of the East Zone regime filled him with alarm. The Soviets would almost certainly refer us to the East German regime and the regime would surely insist on negotiations of the most formal nature possible and on the highest possible official level. This would be unfortunate enough by itself, Herr Straetling commented, but the future consequences for the Federal German and Western position toward Berlin and the Soviet Zone might be still graver. The Soviet Zone regime would be sure to repeat the blackmail tactics as frequently as possible, while the Soviets might be encouraged to hand over their authority for air and road access to Berlin to the Zonal regime, and would be able to distance themselves still further from their responsibility for events in the Zone and for Germany as a whole.

Herr Straetling pointed out that a similar incident could take place any day with the British, French or German armed forces and in the latter case, with the American precedent in mind, the Federal Government would not be able

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to withstand probable Soviet Zone demands for negotiations between "the two German States" at a high political level in order to assure return of the soldiers. American negotiation with the Zonal regime might give considerable help to the regime in convincing the East Zone population that continued resistance to it was futile since even its principal enemy, the United States, had now officially if reluctantly accepted its existence. In the Federal Republic, the American action would have the effect of encouraging those forces, including the Social Democrats, which believed that closer relations with the Soviet Zone regime were the only practical way to make progress towards German reunification, while weakening the reluctance of the majority of the West German population to follow such a course.

Comment

Herr Straetling's language showed that he took the subject very seriously. His remarks on the reaction of the German public to the situation are of interest because, while he is a relatively junior officer at the German Embassy, his six years of duty in Bonn covering the activities of the Bundestag for the Foreign Office have made him one of the most perceptive and reliable observers of the attitude of the German public and of the effect of German public opinion on the Federal Government and parliament.

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